

## **Yuri Kostenko and Ukrainian National Democratic Movement: chances for revival**

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On May 19, 1999, the Kyiv regional court endorsed the decision of the Ministry of Justice of Ukraine on illegitimacy of election of Yuri Kostenko as the chairman of the Ukrainian People's Movement Rukh. The court also recognized validity of changes and amendments made by the Rukh's charter by the party congress in March 1999. At the end of June the Supreme Court of Ukraine left the judgment of the Kyiv regional court unchanged. By that time Yuri Kostenko had collected over one million eight hundred thousand signatures of potential voters, required for official registration as a presidential candidate, and joined the two fore-runners, president Leonid Kuchma and leader of Ukrainian Communists Petro Symonenko.

The fact that the court denied him the right to use the name of the Rukh as his campaign brand name did not discourage Yuri Kostenko - nor did it prevent the Central Election Commission from registering him as a presidential candidate. Hennady Udovenko, who announced his campaign staff had gathered about a million and seven hundred thousand signatures in his support, registered a few days later, also as the leader of the Ukrainian People's Movement Rukh, thus leaving voters at a loss as to which of the parts of the Rukh to support.

Following the judgment of the Constitutional Court that recognized the legitimacy of Hennady Udovenko's part of the Rukh and its right to keep the party's brand name, the party leadership announced it would sue anybody who would refer to Yuri Kostenko as "head of the "Ukrainian People's Movement Rukh". The threat made some Ukrainian journalists and commentators wonder whether they still could call Mr. Kostenko "the brain of the Rukh".

Hennady Udovenko believes that the Rukh is gaining force and expects millions of new supporters, while hoping that the "mutiny" will soon be forgotten and inviting the "lost sheep" back. "The sheep", over 90 percent of whom were among founders and the oldest members of the Rukh, are not prepared to be screened for loyalty to a politician who has never been one of Rukh's ideologists or even a confirmed fighter for Ukraine's independence. Meanwhile, many of Rukh's rank-and-file members behave as if no split-up occurred. Representatives of regional organizations who attended the nomination meeting of Yuri Kostenko's wing of the Rukh argued no split-up had occurred in their regions. Apparently, subnational organizations hope that the leaders will be able to come to terms and the two parts will reunite. Hennady Udovenko's backers say they represent 17 thousand out of 25 thousand Rukh members. About the same number of backers is claimed by Yuri Kostenko's wing. According to Yuri Kostenko, the fact that Speaker Oleksandr Tkachenko decided to run for presidency made chances of "democrats" "substantially stronger", as voters will be deterred by the Speaker's generally anti-democratic position. It is unclear, however, whether the reference to "democrats" included the incumbent president. Notwithstanding the fact that the current executive branch benefits substantially from using the divided and weakened Rukh, Kostenko's wing is more difficult for the establishment to tame. Speaking to his potential voters in Dnipropetrovsk, Yuri Kostenko accused the executive authorities of fighting their opponents with "the same brutal methods as ten years ago", after he and five other MPs, members of his wing of the Rukh, were denied entry to a conference hall they had pre-paid for the meeting. Apparently, not only Socialists, Pavlo Lazarenko's Hromada or other opposition forces may face pressure if they are perceived as an alternative to the incumbent president's re-election bid. According to Yuri Kostenko, his election campaign team experienced pressure of local authorities for the first time in Luhansk, when the local fire inspection prohibited to have the meeting five minutes it was scheduled to start.

It is believed that Yuri Kostenko will possibly step down and urge his voters to support another candidate is accompanied with ambiguity about Mr. Kostenko's real intentions: although stressing that he "always declared agreement to withdraw from the race in favor of the one who has real chances to win the presidential election", while arguing that "as a representative of the right-wing ideology" he would not agree to "surrender to a left-winger", he denies any intention to give up in favor of any candidate. "I have joined the election because our part of the People's Movement Rukh does not want us to play a role in somebody's political combinations", he argues. Aware that "all break-ups have been caused by the presidential election", he still argues it would be difficult for him to imagine effective cooperation with leaders of "the other Rukh" - Hennady Udovenko, Les Taniuk, Yaroslav Kendzior or

Mykhailo Kosiv. Though Yuri Kostenko admitted he would be prepared to step down in favor of a single democratic candidate, it is unlikely that the candidate's name will be Udovenko. Yet, in December 1998, speaking in favor of transforming the Rukh into "the party of power", he regretted that the Ukrainian political system does not include the position of vice president: otherwise the Udovenko-Kostenko team would bring Ukraine to the third millennium, he said. Under the circumstance, the alliance "for the third millennium" seems hardly likely.

In the view of Yuri Kostenko's supporters, his strengths include the absence of communist party experience in the past, democratic views, political integrity and the longest term in successive governments of Ukraine. The same features can be interpreted as weaknesses by those who do not subscribe to his agenda. He occupied the position of Minister of the Environment for five years - longer than any other minister in Ukraine's seven governments - and was praised for his steadiness in defending the society's environmental rights. On the other hand, he did not succeed in resolving the dilemma of the Chornobyl nuclear power plant, nor introduction of environment-friendly technologies, nor waste treatment facilities. The ambiguity about his personal contribution to democracy building and overcoming the current systemic crisis will cost Mr. Kostenko a large number of votes.

His campaign agenda does not offer any original pledges. As a recipe for saving Ukraine's ailing economy, he suggests there is a need to create conditions for profound development of enterprise as a condition for deeper economic reform. Meanwhile, for the first time in the history of the Ukrainian national democratic movement Yuri Kostenko made an effort to claim part of traditional communist electorate, appearing at the May day demonstration with slogans condemning the authorities for massive impoverishment of the people and making his campaign message on pledges to ensure timely payment of wages, salaries and social benefits. Like his left-wing rivals, he condemned the current "anti-state regime", the mafia, officials' accounts in Swiss banks, and mourned the ruination of the national economy. There at the rally the name of Yevhen Marchuk was mentioned publicly for the first time as a possible single candidate of the right-wingers. Serhiy Peresunko, chairman of the Social Democratic Union, established earlier this year exclusively to support Yevhen Marchuk's bid for presidency, believes that Yuri Kostenko's part of the Rukh may support Yevhen Marchuk as the most "social democratic" candidate. Yuri Kostenko repeatedly denied any negotiations with Yevhen Marchuk's team. Joining forces with Kostenko would enhance Marchuk's chances but will hardly have a decisive victorious effect for either of the candidates; that is why the alliance seems unlikely in the short run.

Yuri Kostenko and leaders of a number of other political forces demonstrated ability to come to terms and choose one candidate to back during the recent election of the mayor on Kyiv, described by many observers as a "dressed rehearsal" of the forthcoming presidential election. Then, he and another potential presidential candidate and his competitor for the role of the only Rukh leader Hennady Udovenko shook hands in front of the cameras, thus, giving hopes that the two fragments of the major national democratic party may agree to support one democratic candidate in the face of a possibility that the winner will be a left-winger. The hopes, however, may be premature: both of the candidates have repeatedly stated they are determined to "go to the end", and neither of them appears to be prepared to drop his ambitions in favor of the political rival.

Yuri Kostenko sees possibilities to expand his base of support with the help of Anatoly Matvienko's breakaway part of People's Democratic Party, part of the Democratic Party, and part of the Party of Reforms and Order. Remarkably, the mainstream parts of the first two parties announced their support for the incumbent president, while the Party of Reforms and Order that has been urging National Bank Governor Victor Yushchenko to run, and later encouraged presidential ambitions of its leader Victor Pynzenyk, now supports Hennady Udovenko.

The developments in the Ukrainian People's Movement Rukh and the competition of two ex-ministers who are neither the party's veterans nor its ideologists signify the end of the "romantic" stage in the Ukrainian national democratic movement in general, and the Rukh in particular, and the beginning of a more pragmatic approach to politics after the Rukh ceased to represent an ideology and deteriorated into a weaker political party. The only force that benefitted from the split-up in the Rukh and the failure of national democrats to agree on a common candidate who would have real chances at the forthcoming election is the current executive establishment. Since it is unlikely that the second round (if any) of the presidential race will be a competition between the incumbent president and a democratic candidate, while there is a strong probability that the president's challenger will be either Petro Symonenko or Natalia Vitrenko or Oleksandr Tkachenko, we may expect that Yuri Kostenko, as well as other non-left candidates (probably except Oleksandr Moroz and Yevhen Marchuk) will be inclined to support the incumbent president rather than face the failure and potential communist relapse.

According to Yuri Kostenko, today, when democratic forces are divided, their arrival to power is unrealistic. Supporters of his competitor Hennady Udovenko share this view and do not expect that their leader will gain more than 10 percent of the vote. Meanwhile, though this election is likely to be lost by national democrats, participation in the race may serve to the advantage of Yuri Kostenko and give additional volume to his efforts to create a broad democratic coalition after the presidential election. Properly developed and supported with major financial injection, such a coalition may target success at the 2002 parliamentary election and become a significant force for the next presidential election, planned for 2004. The first step was made by several right and center-right political parties and groups that signed a declaration to form a coalition, seen by Yuri Kostenko as the only way to become crises in the democratic movement and the country in general.

Yuri Kostenko's participation in the presidential election will weaken the left-wing camp by pulling away votes that otherwise could be cast for moderate left-wingers like Oleksandr Moroz, or by encouraging those who, for some reason, are not satisfied with any of centrist or right-wing candidates, primarily his rival for the Rukh Udovenko, to come to the polling stations. On the other hand, Kostenko's participation in the presidential race will add credibility to his political image and raise his chances for creating a viable center-right coalition. However, paradoxically, for the coalition to have chances to succeed in future campaigns, Kostenko will have to step down in favor of a more dynamic and charismatic leader.